Forms and Conceptions of Reality in French Body Art of the 1970s

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> "Performance is no longer a copy of reality, nor is it a fiction, as is the case in theatre and film: it is reality itself. We are no longer dealing with hypothetical imitation, since the spectator experiences a slice of life that leaves no room for doubt. It is a performative act that takes place in real time, which the audience cannot ignore. Unlike happenings, which sought to 'incite participation', performance aims for the assimilation of the 'other' through processes of identification."
>
> Gina Pane, "Actions", 1965-1968[1]

According to Gina Pane (1939-1990), the fact that performance art, as it was practised in France in the late 1960s, was anchored in "reality" set it apart from artistic media that continued to adopt a position of exteriority, contemplation or imitation. Along with Michel Journiac (1935-1995) and the art critic François Pluchart (1937-1988), Gina Pane was one of the main exponents of the French body art movement known as *art corporel*. This group, who endeavoured to make the body an "artistic material"[2], was part of the fast-developing international art scene of the 1960s and 1970s, which also included other movements of body art, performance art and happenings. Gina Pane saw performance art as distinct from happenings, which were known at the time for their participatory aspect, because performance involves processes of "assimilation" and "identification". Yet how can the body elicit a reaction of assimilation and identification without involving participation? What are the processes by which the staging of actions can penetrate this

"reality" that the spectator "cannot ignore", and what reality is it, exactly?

In this paper, we will concentrate our analysis exclusively on performance art of the 1970s in France, with the aim of shedding some light on these artists' and critics' understanding of the meaning of the terms "reality" and the "real", with a special focus placed on documentation provided by the French art journal *arTitudes*, which was edited by François Pluchart from 1971 to 1977[3] and offers a rich source of critical essays, interviews, scripts and photographs of performances.[4]

A social critique of artistic abstraction: unveiling realities

For the protagonists of *art corporel*, revealing "reality" signified first and foremost using the body to present elements associated with the real and the living, rather than with aesthetic values that had become institutionalised and were presumed to be legitimate. This mobilisation of living matter was set in opposition to an artistic language that was saturated with history, with the artists positioning their work as a "critical exercise". As François Pluchart explains, "Art has nothing to do with aesthetics. It is a critical exercise and its effectiveness is all the greater because it directly challenges the failings of society"[5] (fig. 1).

Pluchart advocated a process of confronting the "failings of society" and an increasing awareness of the inadequacies of the social system, while at the same time arguing for a critical approach to aesthetics and, more broadly, beauty. We can gain a clearer understanding of his stance by exploring specific aspects of the intellectual history of these decades, particularly relating to French sociology of the period. Pluchart's position effectively involved an examination of the connections between aesthetic values and class relations – an issue that was the subject of unprecedented analysis in the field of sociology at the time.

Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu led a number of studies on culture and public institutions that highlighted the underrepresentation of the "lower" classes among museum visitors and the domination of the "upper" classes in the production and control of "legitimate" cultural values.[6] Bourdieu argues that one of the underlying reasons for this dynamic is the "autonomisation", or increasing self-sufficiency, of avant-garde art

arTitudes

rédacteur en chef : françois pluchart — mensuel • numéro 6 • avril/mai 1972 • 5 F

Cézanne, on s'en fout !

Lorsque l'art atteint à une intensité telle que celle qu'on lui connaît aujourd'hui, l'art le plus académique, celui qui prétend incarner une tradition de beauté ouverte par Cézanne, relève la tête. C'est ce qui s'est produit naturellement et par opposition aux travaux de Manzoni et, plus tard, Beuys, Acconci, Journiac ou Gina Pane. Le plus étonnant est que cet art passéiste et réactionnaire trouve des théoriciens besogneux pour le défendre et l'opposer à la véritable création qui, dans leur langage, devient une pratique du « n'importe quoi ». Il y a plus que de la malhonnêteté dans cette attitude : une imposture à l'égard des courants novateurs de la pensée et une lâcheté devant la nécessité qui est faite à chacun d'assumer son époque.

Faire aujourd'hui remonter à Cézanne l'origine d'un art déclaré moderne relève d'une supercherie et d'une falsification de l'histoire. Il est vrai que le piège est si remarquablement tendu, l'affaire si bien montée, la notion si généralement admise qu'il faut faire du départ un grand effort d'analyse de la situation pour ne pas être victime d'une théorie dont le but avoué est de masquer la création authentique, d'aseptiser la culture et d'étouffer les formes novatrices de la pensée, celles qui s'appuient sur les réalités des données sociales et dont la finalité est précisément de dénoncer les tares de la société présente en vue d'instaurer une société plus humaine et plus juste.

(Suite page 9)

SOMMAIRE

Action de Gina Pane, le 6 avril à Belgrade (information page 17).

1 François Pluchart, "Cézanne, on s'en fout!", *arTitudes*, No. 6, April/May 1972, p. 1

production at that time, which he describes in his sociological report *La Distinction* (1979) as an aesthetic process of detaching the "form" of artistic representation from its "subject":

> "To assert the autonomy of production is to give primacy to that of which the artist is master, i.e. form, manner, style, rather than the 'subject', the external referent, which involves subordination to functions – even if only the most elementary one, that of representing, signifying, saying something. It also means a refusal to recognise any necessity other than that inscribed in the specific tradition of the artistic discipline in question: the shift from an art that imitates nature to an art that imitates art, deriving from its own history the exclusive source of its experiments and even of its breaks with tradition."[7]

"Autonomisation" refers to the gradual loss of external referents and the increasing importance of self-referentiality as a means of legitimising artistic production. The underlying aesthetic values of this process are "disinterest", "detachment", "distance" and the "purity" of emotions. Bourdieu describes the Kantian aesthetic of the judgement of taste in terms of a notion of "pure taste", which is independent of social class and based on purely subjective and theoretical justifications. To illustrate his view, he cites specific art movements, including the Nouveau Roman ("New Novel") movement and post-impressionist painting, which represent the culmination of autonomous artistic values that no longer seek justification in "nature", but rather in art itself.

Another point advanced by Bourdieu is the idea that this self-referential approach to meaning involves a separation between categories considered culturally legitimate and others that are judged to be illegitimate. Legitimate values, which are those considered to meet the requirements of the process of autonomisation, are confined to the "higher strata" of society and the dominant culture. At the other extreme, the "popular aesthetic", which is more concerned with function than form, becomes disadvantaged by the emergence of autonomous artistic production: "It is as if the 'popular aesthetic' […] were based on the affirmation of the continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function."[8]

In this way, the lower classes' general disinterest in contemporary art, as confirmed by numerous studies of museum-goers conducted during this period, is a result of the dissociation of avant-garde art from "life".

This radical critique of the increasing autonomy of the "legitimate aesthetic" serves as a point of connection between these theories and the discourse of members of *art corporel*. As we have described, these artists called for a radical break with aesthetics as well as a renewal of the connection between art and life: "We may now have reached the zero degree of aesthetics and the problem is no longer the notion of beauty, but life itself", Michel Journiac declared.[9]

The correlation between this aesthetic of "the living" and "popular" values was at times specifically referred to by practitioners of body art, as, for example, when the artist's position was defended as being that of a child of the "cultural proletariat".[10] *Art corporel* thus identified itself as a critical exercise directed at culture as it was defined by sociologists at the time: a value system caught up in power struggles between the social classes. By stressing the "continuity between art and life", Journiac called

for a direct and fundamental alliance between art and the fields of life sciences and social sciences, in which the "body" and the "real" served as vehicles to express his "sermon" to "the living". In these artists' work, the body is presented as the receptacle of sociological mechanisms – more specifically, as the carrier of the *habitus*, a term that Bourdieu describes in this way:

> "Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, embodied, helps to shape the class body. It is an incorporated principle of classification that governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates, physiologically and psychologically."[11]

According to Bourdieu, the body is fully integrated into social space and inextricably linked to class structure. This view of the ultimate corporeality of social processes formulated in *La Distinction* is an indication that deterministic theories were not far from the surface in both sociological thought and the art world at that time. The idea that the body is a product sculpted by social conditioning is omnipresent in *art corporel*: François Pluchart, for example, describes the body as a "receptacle of sociological data".[12] At the same time, his statements and those of the artists who supported him maintain that the body also possesses an unpredictable nature, which tends to place it outside the social realm. It is within this oscillation between a radically innovative and a ritualised view of the body that we will observe the development of their practices and discourse.

Immediacy and biological impulses: sudden manifestations of the real

> "Culture in survival mode, the universal whore who can tolerate all the games, capable of entrapping all experimentation with the sticky saliva of its words, cannot accept that its underlying language is called into question when the body and the real suddenly emerge."[13]

Michel Journiac's radical rhetoric vehemently denounces the established social, political, cultural and artistic order, according to which body art was deemed unacceptable. But from the perspective of this art movement, it was culture – in its institutionalised form – that appeared to fail the various art practices, notably by merely juxtaposing them without

making any attempt to differentiate them or define a hierarchy. Body art challenged this tolerance by reaching beyond all the previously accepted forms of artistic expression. Through its inventiveness and via the explosion of new art practices in the social arena, it sought to breathe new life into culture. Its effectiveness in doing this hinges on the abruptness, even brutality, of the body's presence in actions. François Pluchart describes the type of "discourse" that accompanies corporeal performance in this way: "The body expresses a discourse, but it is a discourse that immediately takes into account the action of the shapes, colours and discontinuities in the space."[14]

From Pluchart's critical viewpoint, the "discourse" of the body thus has a remarkable ability to assess shapes, colours and spaces "immediately", that is, without mediation, which is very different from media that utilises language. The "immediacy" of bodily expression stems from the directness and spontaneity of the performances and their ephemeral nature: actions are original events that take place in the here and now and cannot be repeated.

The "language" of the body referred to by François Pluchart relates to the progression of the performance over time – a temporality from which we cannot escape, which Gina Pane also alludes to when she says that the audience "cannot ignore" the artistic act. There is a kind of restrictive brutality in such a solicitation of the "real", as seen in the role played by flesh in this type of action. Organic matter – skin, blood and flesh – was regularly utilised in the most tangible way possible. Flesh is also an important component of the documentation of these events, particularly in photographs featuring naked skin, body fluids and live tissue. We are reminded of Gina Pane's expression "a slice of life": the "real" is associated with "living things", expressed in the cutting of flesh, revealing its rawest and most primal form. Pane frequently used the act of self-cutting in her work, as recorded in photographs taken by her associate Françoise Masson. We are familiar with the photographs of *Azione Sentimentale* (*Sentimental Action*), taken in 1973 at the Diagramma Gallery in Milan, in which we see Pane's forearm encrusted with a line of rose thorns (fig. 2 and 3), as well as those of *Psyché*, which she performed in 1974 at the Stadler Gallery in Paris, which show small incisions made by a razor blade on the artist's eyelids and around her navel (fig. 4). The image of blood forming tiny pearls on the surface of her skin is one of the most arresting aspects of Gina Pane's performances and the resulting photographs.

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Gina Pane : Azione Sentimentale, 1973, galerie Diagramma (photo Françoise Masson).

47

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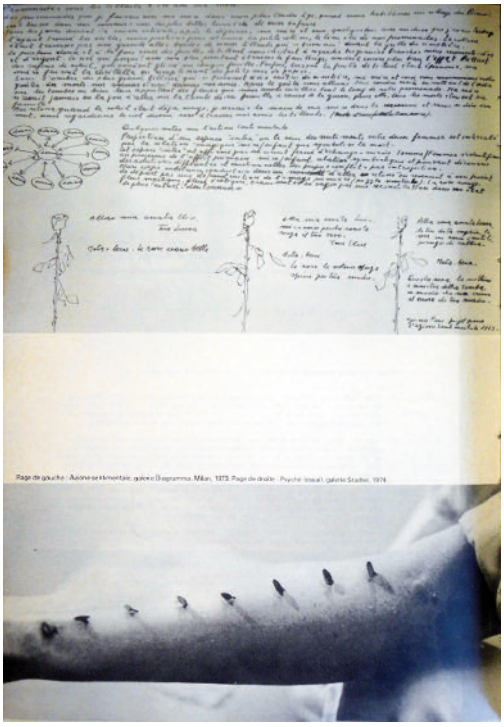


Page de gauche : Azione sentimentale, galerie Diagramma, Milan, 1973. Page de droite : Psyché (essai), galerie Stadler, 1974.

2 "Langage plastique de Gina Pane", *arTitudes international*, No. 6-8, December 1973-March 1974, p. 47 (Gina Pane : *Azione sentimentale*, galerie Diagramma)

3 "Dossier Gina Pane", *arTitudes International*, No. 15-17, October-December 1974, p. 33 (*Azione sentimentale*, galerie Diagramma, Milan, 1973)

4 François Pluchart, "L'art corporel", *arTitudes international*, No. 18-20, Januar-March 1975, (Gina Pane : Two reports of the action *Psyché* (test), galerie Stadler), p. 67

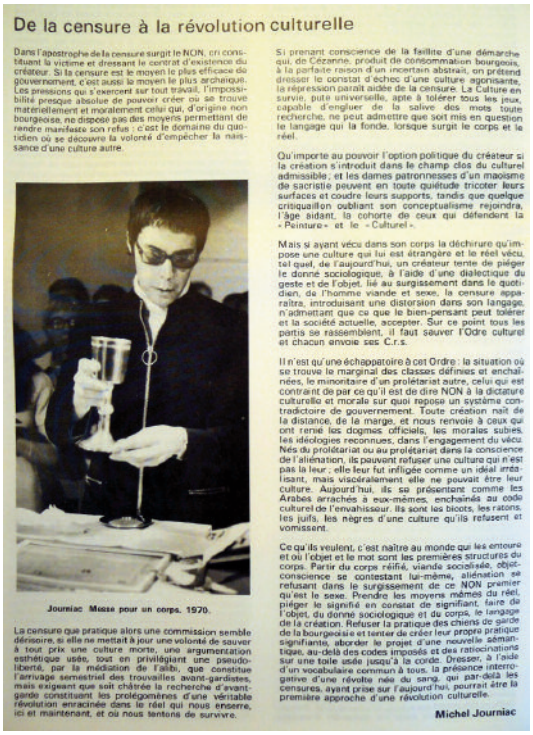
4

Gina Pane : deux constats de l'action Psyché (essai) à la galerie Stadler.


Messe pour un corps, en 1969, à la galerie Daniel Templon.

5 Michel Journiac, "Les rituels corporels", *arTitudes international*, No. 6-8, December 1973-March 1974, p. 29 (*Mass for a Body*, 6 November 1969, galerie Daniel Templon)

The use of body fluids was far less frequent in the work of Michel Journiac, although they played a key role in a memorable performance entitled *Messe pour un corps* (*Mass for a Body*), which was performed at the Daniel Templon Gallery in Paris in 1969. In this work, he enacted a pseudo-religious service at which he served the audience a sausage made from his own blood (fig. 5 and 6). One of the photographs of this work, entitled *First stage in the preparation of the human blood sausage,* which was published in *arTitudes* in 1974, shows the artist reclining with a tourniquet applied to his forearm, while a syringe held by an anonymous person draws his blood (fig. 7). Indeed, references to "flesh", "meat", "genitals" and "blood" appear very regularly in the artist's discourse: he wrote that "the creator is, above all, a piece of meat who dares to question himself and say NO".[15] But the outstanding feature of this "piece of meat" is its ability to say "no". Negation is a theme that runs through Journiac's writings: the creator is identified as an organic substance that is liberated from its physical condition by its power of resistance. This act of rebellion is undertaken for the sake of the body against the constraints imposed on it by society. On this subject, François Pluchart comments on the work of Gina Pane:



De la censure à la révolution culturelle

Dans l'apostrophe de la censure surgit le NON, cri constituant la victime et dressant le contrat d'existence du créateur. Si la censure est le moyen le plus efficace du gouvernement, c'est aussi le moyen le plus archaïque. Les pressions qui s'exercent sur tout travail, l'impossibilité presque absolue de pouvoir créer où se trouve matériellement et moralement celui qui, d'origine non bourgeoise, ne dispose pas des moyens permettant de rendre manifeste son refus : c'est le domaine du quotidien où se découvre la volonté d'empêcher la naissance d'une culture autre.

Journiac Messe pour un corps. 1970.

La censure que pratique alors une commission semble dérisoire, si elle ne mettait à jour une volonté de sauver à tout prix une culture morte, une argumentation esthétique usée, tout en privilégiant une pseudo-liberté, par la médiation de l'alibi, que constitue l'arrivage semestriel des trouvailles avant-gardistes, mais exigeant que soit châtrée la recherche d'avant-garde constituant les prolégomènes d'une véritable révolution enracinée dans le réel qui nous enserre, ici et maintenant, et où nous tentons de survivre.

Si prenant conscience de la faillite d'une démarche qui, de Cézanne, produit de consommation bourgeois, à la parfaite raison d'un incertain abstrait, on prétend dresser le constat d'échec d'une culture agonisante, la répression paraît aidée de la censure. La Culture en survie, pute universelle, apte à tolérer tous les jeux, capable d'enguer de la salive des mots toute recherche, ne peut admettre que soit mis en question le langage qui la fonde, lorsque surgit le corps et le réel.

Qu'importe au pouvoir l'option politique du créateur si la création s'introduit dans le champ clos du culturel admissible ; et les dames patronnesses d'un maoïsme de sacristie peuvent en toute quiétude tricoter leurs surfaces et coudre leurs supports, tandis que quelque critiquaillon oubliant son conceptualisme rejoindra, l'âge aidant, la cohorte de ceux qui défendent la « Peinture » et le « Culturel ».

Mais si ayant vécu dans son corps la déchirure qu'impose une culture qui lui est étrangère et le réel vécu, tel quel, de l'aujourd'hui, un créateur tente de piéger le donné sociologique, à l'aide d'une dialectique du geste et de l'objet, lié au surgissement dans le quotidien, de l'homme viande et sexe, la censure apparaîtra, introduisant une distorsion dans son langage, n'admettant que ce que le bien-pensant peut tolérer et la société actuelle, accepter. Sur ce point tous les partis se rassemblent, il faut sauver l'Ordre culturel et chacun envoie ses C.r.s.

Il n'est qu'une échappatoire à cet Ordre : la situation où se trouve le marginal des classes définies et enchaînées, le minoritaire d'un prolétariat autre, celui qui est contraint de par ce qu'il est de dire NON à la dictature culturelle et morale sur quoi repose un système contradictoire de gouvernement. Toute création naît de la distance, de la marge, et nous renvoie à ceux qui ont renié les dogmes officiels, les morales subies, les idéologies reconnues, dans l'engagement du vécu. Nés du prolétariat ou au prolétariat dans la conscience de l'aliénation, ils peuvent refuser une culture qui n'est pas la leur ; elle leur fut infligée comme un idéal aliénant, mais viscéralement elle ne pouvait être leur culture. Aujourd'hui, ils se présentent comme les Arabes arrachés à eux-mêmes, enchaînés au code culturel de l'envahisseur. Ils sont les bicots, les ratons, les juifs, les nègres d'une culture qu'ils refusent et vomissent.

Ce qu'ils veulent, c'est naître au monde qui les entoure et où l'objet et le mot sont les premières structures du corps. Partir du corps réifié, viande socialisée, objet-conscience se contestant lui-même, aliénation se refusant dans le surgissement de ce NON premier qu'est le sexe. Prendre les moyens mêmes du réel, piéger le signifié en constat de signifiant, faire du l'objet, du donné sociologique et du corps, le langage de la création. Refuser la pratique des chiens de garde de la bourgeoisie et tenter de créer leur propre pratique signifiante, aborder le projet d'une nouvelle sémantique, au-delà des codes imposés et des ratiocinations sur une toile usée jusqu'à la corde. Dresser, à l'aide d'un vocabulaire commun à tous, la présence interrogative d'une révolte née du sang, qui par-delà les censures, ayant prise sur l'aujourd'hui, pourrait être la première approche d'une révolution culturelle.

Michel Journiac

6 Michel Journiac, "De la censure à la révolution culturelle", *arTitudes*, No. 5, March 1972 (Journiac, *Mass for a Body*, 1970 – detail)

7 François Pluchart, "L'art corporel", *arTitudes international*, No. 18-20, Januar-March 1975, p. 75 (Michel Journiac, *First stage in the preparation of the human blood sausage*, 1969, galerie Stadler)

> "This demonstration of aggression, which was so intense as to be, at times, unbearable, made an invaluable contribution to body art and to the art of Gina Pane, whose works are some of the most open and accessible of this movement due to the fact that they originate from biological facts and impulses."[16]

Pluchart's way of describing the "carnal aggression" expressed in Gina Pane's work is particularly interesting when it is associated with the notion of "biological facts". The raw, brutal presence of bodily matter is self-evident – it is impulsive and its presence demands immediate attention, in the sense that the sight of blood can instantly provoke a reaction of fear or disgust.

As has been pointed out by the American philosopher Judith Butler (among others), such an interpretation could be seen as an attempt to naturalise or essentialise the body's physicality, as though the functions and significations of the body could be explained by purely physiological mechanisms.[17] The essential attributes of the work are those which cannot be reproduced; they exist only in the here and now. The way in which the work comes into being and the impulse behind it imply a process of emergence that is impossible to anticipate or predict. Viewed in this way, the event takes place without precedent or prior existence: it is original.

The high value placed on the originality of ephemeral events and the irreducible nature of flesh, which we can qualify as an "ontological" conception, differentiates *art corporel* from other movements of this period. But it is not only the presence of the artist that was considered to be real in performances, it is also the artist's relationship with spectators and their reactions, and even the role of photographs and other documentation of events. While these artists and critics asserted their belief in the signifying primacy of the physical body, their reasoning and practices were also based on processes of hybridisation and transformation. In the view of Gina Pane and François Pluchart, the immediacy of the intended effect of these works did not function independently of social forces.

From the real body to bodily reality: the rituality of flesh and the performativity of matter

"The body comes first – it appears with blood and clothing."[18]

This statement by Michel Journiac suggests that "blood" and "clothing" appear simultaneously with the body, implying that organic matter has no previous existence, even if it is already, and invariably, imbued with signifiers. In this way, two temporalities can coexist within corporeality: the sudden emergence of organic matter and the slower rituality of social life.

According to Journiac's succinct formulation, bodily signification is not determined by a single factor; on the contrary, it is defined by its hybridity. The artists did not only utilise the materiality of their bodies, but their actions played out the relationship between this materiality and the human, cultural and political constructions that surround it.

Indeed, the exploration of feelings is an important element in defining these actions: the reactions of spectators and the emotions expressed by the artists often provoked violent criticism. "It is, nonetheless, precisely in his flesh that man can live, suffer and find pleasure", writes François Pluchart, "and it is through his flesh that he perceives society and other people, who accept, tolerate or reject him."[19] The critic links flesh and sensations ("suffering" and "pleasure"), our perception of "society" and "other people" and their judgements ("tolerance" and "rejection"). The power of the corporeal is therefore formed within a social relationship that already exists and is an inseparable part of its materiality; the signifiers of flesh and its primal appearance are always interconnected, locked into the relationship between the self and others.

Transformation

Art corporel can be seen as an enactment of this relational definition of organic matter. In his *Messe pour un corps*, Michel Journiac transferred his own body fluids into other people's bodies, transforming the actual composition of their bodily matter. In the work of Gina Pane, the organic transformation of the "other" and by the "other" was carried out in a less tangible way, involving a process of identification that is empathetic and specular. In the works we have studied, we can therefore see that these artists focused on two different modes of transformation.

In Journiac's words, his *Messe pour un corps* is a "communion using human blood".[20] This work imitates the Eucharist, but does away with

the sacrament of transubstantiation, in the sense that the substances activated by the artist did not need to be transformed in order to become his own body or blood: they were already a direct product of his body. During this communion service reduced to a digestive act, the actual substance of his body – his flesh and tissues – was transferred into the spectators' bodies, as though enacting the most literal interpretation possible of Christ's affirmation "This is my Body". The performance was structured around this organic transfer during which the artist offered himself up as food, while the spectators ingested, digested and assimilated his blood – a process by which the spectators' own physical makeup was altered, or fabricated, by that which they ingested.

Michel Journiac's strategy also plays on its similarity with a cookbook recipe: in addition to the raw and provocative presence of organic matter, the artist takes an ironic poke at processes of social ritualisation. He celebrates a "sociological fact" that contains references to a religious ritual (mass) as well as anthropology (cooking recipes). This work clearly suggests that individual flesh is always previously defined, and informed, by rituality and collective experience.

Gina Pane also made frequent reference to this ritualisation that is integral to human corporeality. She writes:

> "My experiments on myself demonstrate that the 'body' is informed and fashioned by society: their aim is to demystify the common image of the 'body' experienced as a bastion of our individuality in order to project it into its essential reality, with the function of social mediation."[21]

"Essential" reality is not a source of signification in its own right, nor does it originate in individual experience, but is, rather, grounded in the collective experience, in connections that develop between individualities. Gina Pane was interested in the way in which society influences and moulds corporeal existence, using the term "reality" to describe this process. The strategies she utilised to stage her actions nonetheless differ from those we have described in the work of Michel Journiac and imply different modes of corporeal transformation.

Openness

Body fluids and blood are recurring elements in the photographs of Gina Pane. Many of her actions included sequences in which she inflicted small wounds on herself, often drawing blood. She describes this practice of cutting herself as a process of opening up:

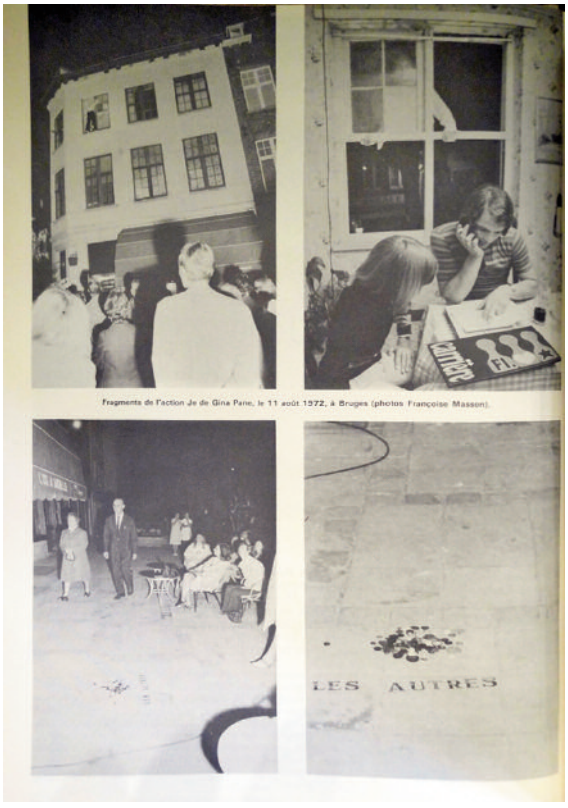
> "If I open my body so that you can see your blood in it, it is for the love of you: the 'other'."[22]

This statement is based on a contradiction: it is "your" blood that you see in "my" body. The "you" is the "other", which, in the context of actions, refers to the spectators. The twisting of meaning here entails a reversal of viewpoints: as the spectators watch the artist's body, they find that they have become the subject of their own gaze.

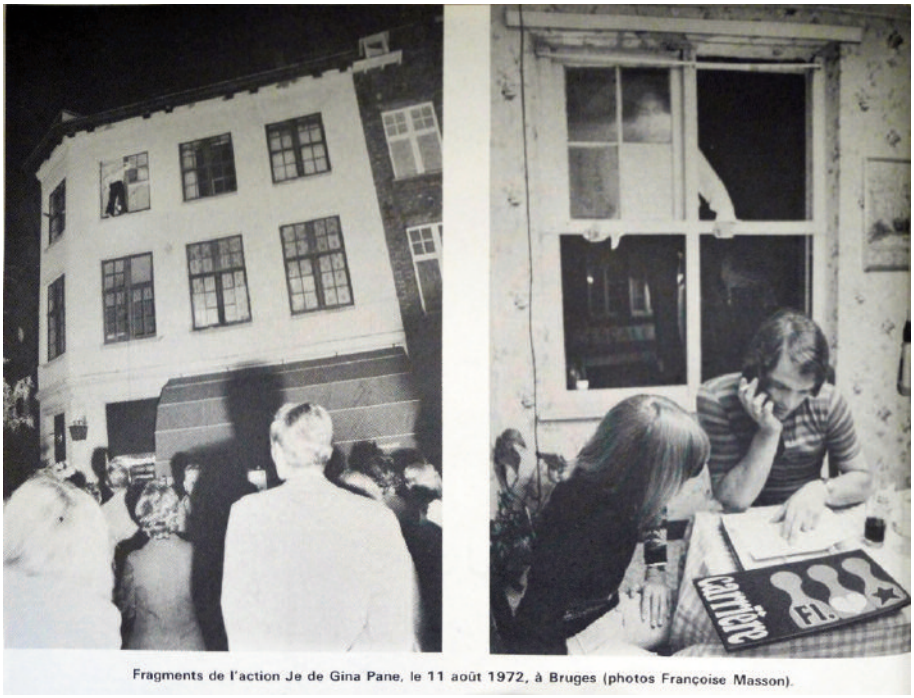
As in Michel Journiac's work, corporeality is understood as something common and shared: body fluids and other substances from one body can belong to other individuals. However, in Gina Pane's work, the mobilisation of body fluids is consistent with a move towards "openness": she instigates communion without displacing matter – simply by opening it up, making it visible. The piercing of the surface of her body alone serves as the vector for stimulating awareness: the injury opens up an opportunity in which the "other" can observe and recognise himself, as though reflected in a mirror. Unlike Michel Journiac's approach in *Messe pour un corps*, Gina Pane evokes empathy without relying on displacement, simply by opening up her bodily envelope and exposing her flesh. Her body thus receives that of the spectator by reflecting his image back to him, and the wounds she inflicts on herself set up a process of specular identification. Her wounds are justified by her desire for the "other" to identify with the action through the medium of her body fluids. This is the process of the "assimilation" of the "other" that she mentions in the introductory quotation to this paper. It is also for this reason that performance art differs from happenings, since performance is not concerned with the physical involvement of the spectator, but rather with displacing the referential meaning of his physical presence. In contrast with Michel Journiac's actions, Gina Pane does not enact a transfer of physical matter or an organic intervention. The transference and identification of the self with the "other" operate through perception and presence, through watching the event and bearing witness to it. This experience, however, cannot be equated with the presumed exteriority

of more traditional art forms. Blood plays an active role in corporeal reality inasmuch as it is seen, watched and observed, and others can relate to it. The subtlety of Gina Pane's statement lies in her claim that the "other" (his viewpoint and his projections) was already a part of her (her body fluids and her physical sensations) prior to opening up her body, and prior to their meeting. She did not activate a decentring, or depersonalisation, of the viewer, nor inspire his compassion – she simply used her action to highlight the fact that the viewer exists and is an operative force.

Another important aspect of this methodology is the vulnerability the artist exposed to the audience. One thinks of the photographs of her action entitled *Je* (Bruges, 11 August 1972), in which she is shown perched precariously on the window-ledge of an apartment, while in the foreground of the image spectators gather in the street below to watch her (fig. 8a). A photograph taken from the kitchen of the apartment shows



8a Gina Pane, "Je", *arTitudes international*, No. 1, October-November 1972, p. 16 (Parts of Gina Pane's action *Je*, 11 August 1972, Bruges)



8b Idem (detail)

the artist through the window facing the camera as the residents of the apartment are seated at a table, going about their business and ignoring her presence (fig. 8b). Here, she offers herself up to the spectators' gaze in a situation of danger, in a space she describes as being "between two zones",[23] a place where danger intervenes. This sense of vulnerability that generates social bonds is of fundamental importance in her work:

> "When I injure myself, I destroy a mythical, or allegorical, attitude by directly associating an emotional fact that relives an experienced reality –'pain' – with an emotional and psychological reality, creating a fundamental connection."[24]

By destroying myths, the artist draws attention to, and deconstructs, ritualised social habits and *habitus*. Gina Pane does not pinpoint a specific subject that she addresses, but rather mentions themes such as femininity, nutrition and nature. Pain serves to evoke "experienced reality", that is, to reiterate the underlying physical, emotional and psychological aspects of the rituals tied up with these themes. The representation of

"injury" creates the reality of bodily suffering: it is within this reality that the relationship with the "other" can be expressed and experienced.

Gina Pane's physical suffering has been a source of fascination ever since the 1960s and has generated considerable discussion, initiated particularly by François Pluchart. Pluchart places considerable emphasis on the communicative properties of pain:

> "Gina Pane does not give the viewer any peace. She breaks down his indifference and hostility, channels his revulsion and inhabits his fear. […] The more the artist senses aversion, hostility or scepticism around her, the more violence she inflicts upon herself, pushing herself to her limits."[25]

Pluchart stresses that such practices imply a form of masochism and self-mutilation, although his comments on this subject go further than statements by the artist herself, for whom pain had no value in itself. For her, the only significance of pain was as a component of the work:

> "If my performance lasts forty to fifty minutes, there are maybe two or three minutes of pain, but there are other things involved than pain of the body. […] In my work there is no actual self-mutilation. The body heals."[26]

In addition to the fact that Gina Pane exercised great caution in her actions,[27] she explains here that she was just as interested in the healing process as the cutting; her work focused not only on the production of the wound, but also on the healing process that took place after the performance. In this way, her process can be seen to follow a continuous loop: the act of closure is already present as a potential force at the moment of "opening", in exactly the same way as the community is already incorporated into her flesh. The body's capacity to heal is an intrinsic part of its reality, as is its capacity to be wounded. This approach is radically different from that of other performing artists of the period, such as, for example, Hermann Nitsch (a member of the Viennese Actionists), who expressed a desire to stage highly sensational performances with an interest in cruelty and violence.

The apparent sense of detachment produced by Gina Pane's highly-controlled performances has the effect of projecting their motivation and ambitions beyond the here and now. In a sense, the time frame in which

the work takes place has already begun prior to "real" time, and the "reality" of her body lies beyond its presence during the experience of pain. In order for healing to occur, the body must evolve over a period of time that is longer than the duration of the action. Moreover, the fact that the blood of the "other" is incorporated in her body implies that their encounter has taken place in a different space and time from the action. This process fully anticipates the duration of repetition: it implies a concept of time that is not single, but plural; a time composed of memory (the artist's blood is a reminder that the spectator's presence exists already) and projection (her body is transformed through scarring). This temporality is diametrically opposed to Michel Journiac's conception of a sudden, original event in which the body and reality emerge as autonomous and unpredictable. By contrast, the effectiveness of Gina Pane's approach lies in the way in which she incorporates a process that is the opposite of self-definition in the here and now and which is consistent with the performativity of matter itself. This process is fuelled by a form of alterity (the presence of the "other" is essential to the execution of the work) and is constructed within a certain historical authenticity, as her body actualises the memory of a collective experience and represents the extended effect of transformation over time.

Conclusion

The methodology developed by Michel Journiac is based on a comparatively linear temporality, consisting of a beginning – the extraction of fluids from his own body – and an end, at which these fluids are transferred into other bodies. The "reality" of the body, which is conditioned by this temporality, is expressed in the transformation that has tangibly affected and altered the bodies of the spectators. The form of representation he proposed is clearly detached from any "mimetic" function, since this particular "reality" could only be transmitted via the actualised sensory response of viewers during the event. On the other hand, the "reality" Gina Pane sought to evoke, which involves repetition and the recording of experience, resides in processes that transcend her own bodily presence and that of the audience, and which existed prior to the "reality" of the action and outlast it. Rather than accomplishing a literal communion of body and blood through flesh, this performative dimension of her work establishes the conditions for the possible realisation of

this communion: opening up and identification. The performativity of her approach empowers us to fully identify with it beyond the temporal limits of the event.

1 Notes collected in *Lettre à un(e) inconnu(e). Gina Pane*, texts compiled by Blandine Chavanne and Anne Marchand in association with Julia Hontou, Paris, ENSBA, 2003, p. 96.

2 "Le corps, matériel d'art" is the title of the first article published in the first edition of the journal *arTitudes* (No. 1, October 1971, p. 1).

3 This journal was one of the *enfants terribles* of avant-garde art publications of the period. Sylvie Mokhtari, *Avalanche-arTitudes-Interfunktionen 1968-1977, trois trajectoires critiques au cœur des revues* [unpublished], PhD thesis, University of Rennes 2, 2003, p. 50.

4 The issues discussed relate to the status of original events, the role of archives, the conditions of presentation and the institutionalisation of artworks. In recent years, a controversy broke out at a retrospective of the work of performance artist Marina Abramović at the MoMA in New York in 2010, entitled *The Artist is Present*. The individual and institutional instrumentalisation of the "presence" of the artist and the "authenticity" her past actions – two notions closely tied to the concept of reality – were more or less unanimously condemned. Among biting reviews of this exhibition, see Amelia Jones, "'The Artist is Present': Artistic Re-Enactments and the Impossibility of Presence", in *TDR: The Drama Review*, No. 55/1, Spring 2011, pp. 16-45; Anne Bénichou, "Marina Abramović: The Artist Is [Tele]Present. Les nouveaux horizons photographiques de la (re)performance", in *Intermédialités*, No. 17, Spring 2011, pp. 147-167; Janig Bégoc, "L'histoire de la performance selon Marina Abramović ou l'art de faire parler les fantômes en public", in *Ligeia*, No. 121-124, January-June 2013, pp. 59-75.

5 François Pluchart, "Cézanne, on s'en fout!", in *arTitudes*, No. 6, April-May 1972, p. 1.

6 Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Les Héritiers: les étudiants et la culture*, Paris, Minuit, coll. "Le sens commun", 1964; Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *L'Amour de l'art: les musées d'art européens et leur public*, Paris, Minuit, coll. "Le sens commun", 1966.

7 Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* [1979], Paris, Minuit, coll. "Le sens commun", 1992, p. IV. (English translation: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge, London, trans. Richard Nice, 1984, p. 3).

8 Ibid., p. V (English version, ibid., p. XXVII).

9 Michel Journiac, "Piège pour une exécution capitale", in *arTitudes*, No. 1, October-November 1971, n. pag.

10 Anne Bénichou, "Marina Abramović: The Artist Is [Tele]Present. Les nouveaux horizons photographiques de la (re)performance", in *Intermédialités*, No. 17, 2011, p. 156.

11 Pierre Bourdieu [1979], 1992 (note 7), p. 377. (English translation: Bourdieu, 1984, p. 190).

12 François Pluchart discussing Michel Journiac, "Piège pour une exécution capitale", in *arTitudes*, 1971 (note 9).

13 Michel Journiac, "De la censure à la révolution culturelle", in *arTitudes*, No. 5, March 1972.

14 François Pluchart, "L'être selon Gina Pane", in *arTitudes*, No. 9/11, April-June 1974, p. 66.

15 "Entretien avec Michel Journiac", in *arTitudes*, No. 8/9, July-August-September 1972, p. 28.

16 François Pluchart, "Les agressions biologiques de Gina Pane", in *arTitudes*, No. 3, December 1971-January 1972, p. 9.

17 See, on this subject, the work of the philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler, who questions ontological and essentialist conceptions of bodies and their significance in relation to sexual and gender constructions. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), New York, Routledge; *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), New York & London, Routledge.

18 Michel Journiac, *"De l'objection du corps", 24 heures de la vie d'une femme ordinaire*, Paris, Arthur Hubschmid, 1974, n. pag.
19 François Pluchart, "Notes sur l'art corporel", in *arTitudes international*, No. 12/14, July-September 1974, p. 55.
20 Michel Journiac, *Cadres de vie*, French Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Environment Institute, 1973, n. pag.
21 Gina Pane, "Lettre à un(e) inconnu(e)", in *arTitudes international*, No. 15/17, October 1974.
22 Ibid.
23 Gina Pane, "Je", in *arTitudes international*, No. 1, October-November 1972, p. 15.
24 Gina Pane, "Blessure", in Chavanne and Marchand, 2003 (note 1), p. 76.
25 Pluchart, 1974 (note 19), p. 60.
26 "Gina Pane Talks with Barbara Smith", in *High Performance*, vol. 2, No. 1, March 1979, p. 17.
27 In the catalogue of the exhibition on the work of Gina Pane held at the Centre Georges Pompidou en 2012, Sophie Duplaix points out the artist's high level of control in front of the audience and her absence of interaction with spectators, as well as the precautions she took regarding the cuts she inflicted on herself: her injuries were invariably superficial, cauterised immediately and she interrupted her actions as soon as she felt any tingling sensations. She also highlights the exaggerated interpretations of François Pluchart regarding the level of pain involved, suggesting that his focus on the pain endured by the artist influenced the memories of readers of *arTitudes*: "What readers remember is, for the most part, the headlines and the shocking pictures […].", Sophie Duplaix, *Gina Pane. Terre-artiste-ciel*, Actes Sud, 2012, pp. 144-145.